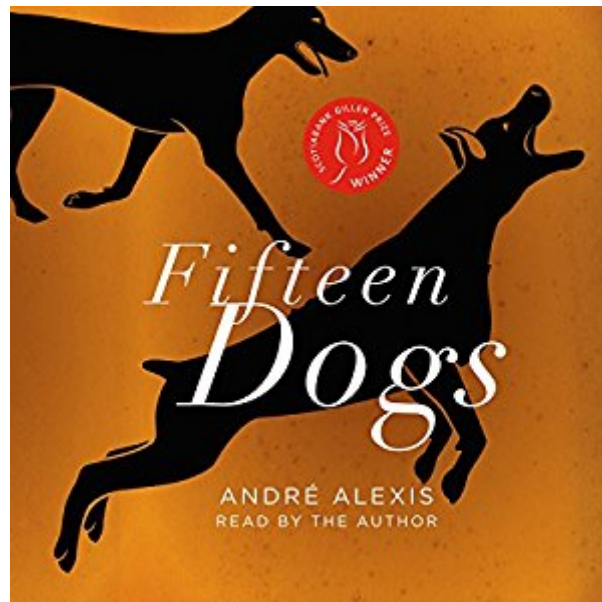


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# Fifteen Dogs



## Synopsis

"I wonder," said Hermes, "what it would be like if animals had human intelligence." "I'll wager a year's servitude," answered Apollo, "that animals - any animal you like - would be even more unhappy than humans are if they were given human intelligence." And so it begins: a bet between the gods Hermes and Apollo leads them to grant human consciousness and language to a group of dogs overnighing at a Toronto veterinary clinic. Suddenly capable of more complex thought, the pack is torn between those who resist the new ways of thinking, preferring the old dog ways, and those who embrace the change. The gods watch from above as the dogs venture into their newly unfamiliar world, as they become divided among themselves, as each struggles with new thoughts and feelings. Wily Benjy moves from home to home, Prince becomes a poet, and Majnoun forges a relationship with a kind couple that stops even the Fates in their tracks. Andr  f   Alexis' contemporary take on the apologue offers an utterly compelling and affecting look at the beauty and perils of human consciousness. By turns meditative and devastating, charming and strange, Fifteen Dogs shows you can teach an old genre new tricks.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Fifteen Dogs was this week awarded the Giller Prize. The jury said: What does it mean to be alive? To think, to feel, to love and to envy? Andr  f   Alexis explores all of this and more in the extraordinary Fifteen Dogs, an insightful and philosophical meditation on the nature of consciousness. It's a novel filled with balancing acts: humour juxtaposed with savagery, solitude

with the desperate need to be part of a pack, perceptive prose interspersed with playful poetry. A wonderful and original piece of writing that challenges the reader to examine their own existence and recall the age old question, what's the meaning of life? In a refreshingly short 171 pages, Mr. Alexis packs as much – if not more – existential punch, metaphysical rumination, and philosophical insight as are contained in some novels that are 900 exasperatingly long pages – not to mention any names (you can click here if you must know) – but after having just finished one such behemoth of a fiction, I was delighted, intrigued, moved, enchanted, and challenged by *Fifteen Dogs*. I am one of those who believe dogs to be of a higher order than humans. I spend a good portion of my life being companion to dogs who live with others, counting among the beings I love (and have loved) the most not a few canines. Thus, the premise of this novel (the following is from the publisher's website) – "I wonder, said Hermes, what it would be like if animals had human intelligence." – "I'll wager a year's servitude, answered Apollo, that animals – any animal you like – would be even more unhappy than humans are, if they were given human intelligence.

*FIFTEEN DOGS* recently won its author the Scotiabank Giller Prize, Canada's richest award. Curious, I looked at the first page: "One evening in Toronto, the gods Apollo and Hermes were in the Wheatsheaf Tavern." What is this, the beginning of some joke? Looking further, I saw the story was mostly about dogs, fifteen of them at first, all duly listed in a "Dramatis Canes" cast list at the start. Oh dear, I thought; the last book I read gave me all the whimsy I could handle for a while. But I was wrong, completely wrong. Just accept the premise, that the gods for a bet endowed a random group of dogs with human intelligence, and you will find yourself enmeshed in a book that is as brutal and thought-provoking as they come, a kind of *LORD OF THE FLIES*, only with dogs. Thought-provoking, yes. Alexis calls this an Apologue, a word I had to look up. According to Wikipedia, it is "a brief fable or allegorical story with pointed or exaggerated details, meant to serve as a pleasant vehicle for a moral doctrine or to convey a useful lesson without stating it explicitly." One example they give is George Orwell's *ANIMAL FARM* which, though entertaining in manner, makes deadly serious political points (as indeed Golding's novel did a decade later). Alexis also moves quickly beyond the stage of entertainment. Of the fifteen dogs released from their animal shelter by Apollo and Hermes, three are afraid to leave the premises, and the rest soon break into murderous quarrels about how to handle their new gifts. It is not long before the fifteen have been reduced to half a dozen. One of the most shocking things is how quickly the so-called gifts of civilization can result in acts of utter brutality.

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